

T H E

L O U N G E R.

N^o. IV.

[N^o IV.]

Saturday, Feb. 26. 1785.

Laudator temporis acti.

HORAT.

“GET thee a place, for I must be idle,” says *Hamlet* to *Horatio* at the play. It is often so with me at public places: I am more employed in attending to the spectators than to the entertainment; a practice which, in the present state of some of our entertainments, I frequently find very convenient. In me, however, it is an indolent, quiet sort of indulgence, which, if it affords some amusement to myself, does not disturb that of any other body.

At an assembly at which I happened to be present a few nights ago, my notice was peculiarly attracted by a gentleman with what is called a fresh look for his age, dressed in a claret-coloured coat with gold buttons, of a cut not altogether modern, and embroidered waistcoat with very large flaps, a major wig, long ruffles nicely plaited, (that looked however as if the fashion had come to them rather than that they had been made for the fashion); his white-silk stockings ornamented with figured clocks, and his shoes with high insteps, buckled with small round gold buckles. His sword, with a silver hilt somewhat tarnished, I might have thought only an article of his dress, had not a cockade in his hat marked him for a military man. It was some time before I was able to find out who he was, till at last my friend Mr S—— informed me he was a very worthy relation of his, who had not been in town above twice these forty years; that an accidental piece of business had lately brought him from his house in the country, and he had been prevailed on to look on the ladies of Edinburgh at two or three public places before he went home again, that he might see whether they were as handsome as their mothers and grandmothers, whom he had danced with at balls, and squired to plays and concerts, near half a century ago. “He was,” continued my friend, “a professed admirer and votary of the sex; and when he was a young man fought three duels for the honour of the ladies, in one of which he was run through the body, but luckily escaped with his life. The lady, however, for whom he fought, did not reward her knight as she ought to have done, but soon after married another man with a larger fortune; upon which he forswore society in a great measure, and though

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“ he continued for several years to do his duty in the army, and actually rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, mixed but little with the world, and has for a long space of time resided at his estate a determined bachelor, with somewhat of misanthropy, and a great deal of good nature about him. If you please, I will introduce you to him.—Colonel Caustic, this is a very particular friend of mine, who solicits the honour of being known to you.” —The Colonel kissed me on both cheeks; and seeming to take a liking to my face, we appeared mutually disposed to be very soon acquainted.

Our conversation naturally began on the assembly, which I observed to be a full one. “ Why, yes,” said the Colonel, “ here is croud enough, and to spare; and yet your ladies seem to have been at a loss for partners. I suppose the greatest part of the men, or rather boys, whom I see now standing up to dance, have been brought in to make up a set, as people in the country sometimes fill up the places in a dance with chairs, to help them to go through the figure. But, as I came too late for the minuets, I presume the dress’d gentlemen walked up stairs after they were ended.” —“ Why, Sir, there are now-a-days no minuets.” —No minuets! —(looking for a while at the company on the floor)—I don’t wonder at it.” —Why, perhaps, Colonel,” said I, “ these young gentlemen have not an aspect quite serious enough for the *pas grave*; and yet yonder is one standing with his back to the fire.” —“ Why, yes, there is something of gravity, of almost melancholy on his face.” —“ Yes, *melancholy and gentleman like*,” said I, “ as *Master Stephen* in the play has it.” —“ Why, that young man, Sir,—now that I have observed him closer,—with that roll of handkerchief about his neck, his square cut striped vest, his large metal buttons and nankeen breeches,—Why, Sir, ’tis a stable boy out of place!”

“ Pray, who are those gentlemen,” said Colonel Caustic, “ who have ranged themselves in a sort of phalanx at the other end of the room, and seem, like the devil in Milton, to carry stern defiance on their brow?” —“ I have not the honour of their acquaintance,” I replied; “ but some of them I presume from the cockades in their hats.” —“ You do not say so,” interrupted the Colonel. “ Is that the military air of the present day? But you must be mistaken; they cannot be real soldiers: Militia, or train-band subalterns, believe me, who, having neither seen service nor good company, contrive to look fierce, in order to avoid looking sheepish. I remember indeed of old, some of our *boys* used to put on that fierce air in coffeehouses and taverns; but they could never dream of wearing it before the ladies.” —“ I think, however,” said Mr S— smiling, “ the ladies don’t seem much afraid of them.” —“ Why, your ladies,” answered the Colonel, “ to say truth, have learned to look people in the face. During the little while I have been in town, I have met with some in my walks, in great coats, riding hats, and rattans, whom I could not show an eye to: but I am newly come from the country; I shall keep a better countenance by and by.”

At that moment a lady and her party, for whose appearance the dancers were waiting, were just entering the room, and seemed in a great

great hurry to get forward. Their progress however was a good deal impeded by a tall stout young man, who had taken his station just at the threshold, and leaning his back against one of the door-posts, with his right foot placed firm on the end of a bench, was picking his teeth with a perfect *nonchalance* to every thing around him. I saw the Colonel fasten a very angry look on him, and move his hand with a sort of involuntary motion towards my cane. The ladies had now got through the defile, and we stood back to make way for them. "Was there ever such a brute?" said Colonel Caustic. The young gentleman stalked up to the place where we were standing, put up his glass to his eye, looked hard at the Colonel, and then—put it down again. The Colonel took snuff.

"Our sex," said I, "Colonel, is not perhaps improved in its public appearance; but I think you will own the other is not less beautiful than it was." He cast his eye round for a few minutes before he answered me. "Why, yes," said he, "Sir here are many pretty, very pretty girls. That young lady in blue is a very *pretty girl*. I remember her grandmother at the same age; she was a *fine woman*."—"But the one next her, with the fanciful cap, and the *panache* of red and white feathers, with that elegant form, that striking figure, is not she a fine woman?"—"Why, no, Sir, not quite a fine woman; not quite such a woman as a man, (raising his chest as he pronounced the word man, and pressing the points of his three unemployed fingers gently on his bosom), as a man would be proud to stake his life for."

"But in short, Sir," continued he,—"I speak to you because you look like one that can understand me.—There is nothing about a woman's person merely, (were she formed like the *Venus de Medicis*), that can constitute a *fine woman*. There is something in the look, the manner, the voice, and still more the silence, of such a one as I mean, that has no connection with any thing material; at least no more than just to make one think such a soul is lodged as it deserves.—In short, Sir, a fine woman,—I could have shewn you some examples formerly. I mean, however, no disparagement to the young ladies here; none upon my honour; they are as well made, and, if not better dressed, at least more dressed than their predecessors; and their complexions I think are better. But I am an old fellow, and apt to talk foolishly."

"I suspect, Caustic," said my friend Mr S—"you and I are not quite competent judges of this matter. Were the partners of our dancing days to make their appearance here, with their humble foretops and brown unpowdered ringlets."—"Why, what then Mr S—?"—"Why, I think those high heads would overtop them a little, that's all."—"Why, as for the *panache*," replied the Colonel, "I have no objections to the ornament itself; there is something in the waving movement of it that is graceful, and not undignified; but in every sort of dress there is a certain character, a certain relation which it holds to the wearer. Yonder now, you'll forgive me, Sir, (turning to me), yonder is a set of girls, I suppose, from their looks and their giggling, but a few weeks from the nursery, whose feathers are in such agitation, whisked about, high and low on this side and on that,"—"Why, Sir, 'tis like the
"Countess

“Countess of *Cassowar*’s menagerie scared by the entrance of her lap-dog.”

“As to dress indeed in general,” continued the Colonel, “that of a man or woman of fashion, should be such as to mark some attention to appearance, some deference to society. The young men I see here, look as if they had just had time to throw off their boots after a fox-chace. But yet dress is only an accessory, that should seem to belong to the wearer, and not the wearer to it. Some of the young ladies opposite to us are so made up of ornaments, so stuck round with finery, that an ill-natured observer might say, their milliner had sent them hither, as she places her doll in her shop-window, to exhibit her wares to the company.”

Mr S—— was going to reply, when he was stopped by the noise of a hundred tongues, which approached like a gathering storm from the card-room. ’Twas my Lady *Rumpus*, with a crowd of women and a mob of men in her suit. They were people of too much consequence to have any of that deference for society which the Colonel talked of. My nerves, and those of my friend S——, though not remarkably weak, could barely stand their approach; but Colonel Caustic’s were quite overpowered.—We accompanied him in his retreat out of the dancing-room; and after, drinking a dish of tea, by way of sedative, as the physicians phrase it, he called for his chair, and went home.

While we were sitting in the tea-room, Mr S—— undertook the apology of my Lady *Rumpus* and her followers. “We must make ‘allowance,’ said he, “for the fashion of the times. In these days, precision of manners is exploded, and ease is the mode.”—“Ease!” said the Colonel, wiping his forehead. “Why, in your days,” said Mr S——, “and I may say in mine too, for I believe there is not much betwixt us, were there not sometimes fantastic modes, which people of rank had brought into use, and which were called genteel because such people practised them, though the word might not just apply to them in the abstract?”—“I understand you, S——,” said the Colonel, “there were such things; some irregularities that broke out now and then. There were mad-caps of both sexes, that would venture on strange things; but they were in a stile somewhat above the canaille: ridiculous enough, I grant you, but not perfectly absurd: coarse, it might be, but not downright vulgar. In all ages, I suppose, people of condition did sometimes entrench themselves behind their titles or their high birth, and committed offences against what lesser folks would call decorum, and yet were allowed to be well bred all the while; were sometimes a little gross, and called it witty; and a little rude, and called it raillery: but ’twas false coinage, and never passed long. Indeed, I have generally remarked, that people did so only because they could not do better; ’tis like pleading privilege for a debt which a man’s own funds do not enable him to pay. A great man may perhaps be well bred in a manner which little people do not understand; but, trust me, he is a greater man who is well bred in a manner that every body understands.”